

Having a Heart of Service

Remedy bad situations with a good response

BY LESLIE CUNNINGHAM

MY SON AND I WERE WAITING PATIENTLY at a local coffee shop for our food order. The lunch crowd began to grow. I felt my anxiety slowly rising, as I knew I only had a small window to work out before the gym daycare closed — and our order still hadn't arrived.

After a brief inquiry at the front counter, I was assured my order was being processed and that it would take a couple more minutes. I went back to wait and chatted casually with my 4-year-old in an attempt to maintain a positive attitude. Ten minutes passed, and again I went back to politely check on my order. Another clerk was at the counter and she went back to the kitchen to inquire about the status of my order. Several minutes later, she returned: "It turns out your order wasn't put in," she said matter-of-factly. I was beyond frustrated — 30 minutes for what was supposed to be a seven-minute order! I asked to speak to a manager, who returned my money and managed to mumble, "Sorry about that."

I rushed out of the coffee shop with my son to get to the gym before the daycare closed, shocked at what had transpired. Not even the manager seemed to care.

After driving as safely and quickly as possible, I parked my car outside the gym and walked briskly with my son in tow. As I walked through the gym doors, the front desk employee smiled at me and then glanced towards my son. A look of discomfort flooded his face.

"I am so, so sorry — the daycare just closed 10 minutes ago!" he said. "I am sincerely sorry for your trouble. I know you probably rushed to get over here." He genuinely seemed to care and was truly apologetic. Not only that, but he took things one step further and handed me a brochure: "Here are the daycare hours. This will help you out in the future. Again, I am so sorry!" His sincerity and empathy touched me. As I returned to the car, I marveled at how I had experienced such contrasting customer-service situations in 45 minutes.

Running a hot tub business provides endless opportunities for dealing with customers from one of two perspectives: The customer as an inconvenience — or an opportunity to truly be of service.

Frequently, service departments experience a litany of phone calls and customer complaints about hot tubs that aren't working properly.

The complaints range from kind and thoughtful to frustrated and upset.

A 1990 *Journal of Marketing* study of favorable and unfavorable incidents in service encounters in the airline, restaurant and hotel businesses revealed that 23.3 percent of the "... memorable satisfactory encounters involve difficulties attributable to *failures* in core service delivery... From a management perspective, this finding is striking. It suggests that even service delivery system failures can be remembered as highly satisfactory encounters if they are handled properly... One might expect that dissatisfaction could be mitigated in failure situations if employees are trained to respond, but the fact that such incidents can be remembered as very satisfactory is somewhat surprising."

That still holds true 25 years later. In servicing hot tubs, there is a huge opportunity for the service team — from the schedulers to the service technicians — to strive to make every frustrated customer's day, and transform every upset customer into a raving fan. Is it easy? No. Is it a challenge that will make a difference to your customers? Yes.

One hot tub business client shared that a customer had purchased a sauna and was extremely unhappy due to multiple service calls. An employee then drove to the customer's house before and after work multiple times to get it running the way it should be. Since then, the customer went on to buy a sauna *and* a hot tub!

Teach your service department to resolve customer frustrations by following these simple steps.

- 1) Acknowledge the problem instead of jumping to defend the company or the service tech involved.
- 2) Empathize and apologize regardless of whether they are right or wrong.
- 3) Accept full responsibility to fix the problem in a timely manner.
- 5) Remain in communication with the customer until the issue is fully resolved.

Encourage your staff to make someone's day. Here's to more happy spa owners, returning customers, raving reviews and increased revenue. **■**

Leslie Cunningham is the founder of Impact & Profits, a coaching and consulting business that empowers business owners, managers and leaders to inspire extraordinary teamwork and breakthrough results with their team. Contact her at leslie@impactandprofits.com
impactandprofits.com

